HEALTHY SCHOOL FACILITIES - A Guide to Resources 2/2001

Air Pollution Air pollution, especially smog caused by exhaust from cars, trucks and buses, has been linked to many respiratory problems and may trigger asthma attacks in children. And air pollution is not just a problem in urban areas. On days when air pollution is bad, outdoor activities for children should be restricted. Check www.epa.gov/airnow for daily air quality forecasts and health alerts. For additional information about air quality in your area contact Kristeen Gaffney at EPA (215-814-2092).

Indoor Air Quality (radon, carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, biological contaminants, environmental tobacco smoke, etc.) Concerns about the increasing rates of asthma in children have lent urgency to the need for preventing and addressing indoor air problems in schools. EPA's voluntary Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kit offers practical guidance about no cost/low-cost steps designed to assist schools in addressing this problem. If you are interested, contact Cristina Schulingkamp at EPA (215- 814-2086) or check out the website www.epa.gov/iaq/schools.

Pesticide Use Careful management of pests at schools can reduce or even eliminate the need to use toxic pesticides. Called Integrated Pest Management or IPM, this approach can make schools much safer for children. For information about how to manage particular pest problems at your school visit one of the many good websites such as www.epa.gov/pesticides/ipm, www.epa.gov/region09/toxic/pest/school and www.ifas.ufl.edu/~schoolipm. Additional information may be obtained from Annie Donnelly at EPA (215-814-3235).

Head lice can be a major nuisance at schools and nurses and parents are often tempted to use medicinal shampoos containing lindane, a persistent and bioaccumulative pesticide. However, these products can cause health problems and lead to water pollution. Additionally, lice are becoming resistant to these chemicals. A less toxic approach for controlling head lice is outlined in either of these websites: www.ifas.ufl.edu/~schoolipm or www.epa.gov/region09/toxic/pest/school.

Insecticidal chalks, manufactured primarily in China, are marketed for killing cockroaches and other pests, but look like ordinary blackboard chalk. The chalk is sold under several labels including "Miraculous Insecticide Chalk" and "Chinese Chalk." These products are not registered with EPA and could expose students and adults to unsafe levels of pesticides. Some children have been hospitalized after eating insecticidal chalk. Apply Integrated Pest Management before using pesticides and if you must use them, be certain they have been registered by EPA and follow directions carefully. A pesticide alert with more information on this chalk is available on www.epa.gov/region09/toxic/pest/chalk.

Janitorial Products Cleaning products used in schools often contain strong chemicals that can pose a health problem if not used carefully. Alternative, less hazardous products can play a role in promoting green buildings and a healthier learning environment. For a list of suggested alternative products, check one of these pollution prevention websites: http://wrrc.p2pays.org or www.westp2net.org/Janitorial/jp4 or call Lorna Rosenberg at EPA (215) 814-5389.

Lead Safe Buildings Current estimates are that close to one million U.S. children have elevated blood lead levels, largely due to exposure to lead paint in older buildings, but sometimes through contaminated soil and drinking water. For more information on lead safety visit this website, www.epa.gov/lead, or call Sondra Allen at EPA (215-814-3150).

PCBs in Lighting Ballasts PCBs or polychlorinated biphenyls are synthetic chemical compounds consisting of chlorine, carbon, and hydrogen. PCBs are no longer manufactured in the United States, but they remain present in commercial products such as older fluorescent lights oftentimes found in schools and office buildings. Most states are working to remove and safely dispose of PCB-containing lighting ballasts in schools. More information can be found on EPA's website www.epa.gov/opptintr/pcb or by calling Charlene Creamer at EPA (215-814-2145).

Asbestos Asbestos is a known carcinogen, yet is still found in building materials. If you are remodeling, repairing, or constructing school facilities, check to make sure no asbestos will be released. Even where no activity is occurring, friable asbestos may be creating a health hazard. For more information visit EPA's asbestos website at www.epa.gov/asbestos, call Tia Chambers, EPA's asbestos coordinator, at (215) 814-2164, or call the Asbestos Hotline at (800) 368-5888.

Mercury Mercury poisoning is linked to nervous system disorders (impaired vision, speech, hearing and coordination), kidney and liver damage, and impaired childhood development. In schools mercury may be found in science and chemistry classrooms where it may be used for experiments or found in thermometers. In the nurse's office it may be found in thermometers, blood pressure devises, and nasal sprays or contact lens solutions. Building thermostats, silent light switches and fluorescent light tubes often contain mercury as well. For more information on mercury and alternative products visit this website www.mercury-k12.org/hgschool.htm or by calling Tad Radzinski at EPA (215-814-2394.

Sun Exposure Globally, ultraviolet (UV) levels are rising, contributing to higher incidences of skin cancer. Because most cases of skin cancer are a result of overexposure to the sun during childhood, it is important that children, their teachers and caregivers understand the dangers and take proper precautions.. In addition to cancer, UV radiation can contribute to other adverse health effects such as cataracts and compromised immune systems. EPA's Sunwise program educates kids and their families about UV risks. Teachers who sign up for this program at the Website www.epa.gov/sunwise will receive a package of materials, including a curriculum, brochures, and a UV monitor that students can use to get real time UV measurements for their community. For more information UV radiation, contact Fran Dougherty at EPA (215-814-2083) or visit the Sunwise website.

In addition to the sources mentioned above, free publications on most of these topics are available through EPA's Public Information Center. Call (215) 814-5121 during standard business hours.